

# Chapter 6



A sense of place requires more direct contact with the natural aspects of a place, with soils, landscape, and wildlife. This sense is lost as we move down the continuum toward the totalized urban environment where nature exists in tiny, isolated fragments by permission only. Said differently, this is an argument for more urban parks, summer camps, greenbelts, wilderness areas, public seashores. If we must live in an increasingly urban world, let's make it one of well-designed compact green cities that include trees, river parks, meandering greenbelts, and urban farms where people can see, touch, and experience nature in a variety of ways.

David W. Orr  
*Ecological Literacy*, 1992

# Conclusion

The *Sonoran Preserve Master Plan* is intended to identify and guide the acquisition of significant desert areas to allow natural processes to continue and to provide safe, accessible public recreation for the citizens and visitors of Phoenix. We have the opportunity to maintain Phoenix's tradition of protecting fragile and beautiful Sonoran Desert lands by building on the history of preservation that began with South Mountain Park and continued with the Phoenix Mountain Preserves. This document can be as successful and far reaching in its impact as its predecessor, the 1971 *An Open Space Plan for the Phoenix Mountains* by Van Cleeve and Associates for the Parks, Recreation and Library Department.

The *Sonoran Preserve Master Plan* is the result of over five years of collaborative effort. The City of Phoenix Parks, Recreation and Library Department has broadened the traditional park planning process to include an understanding of ecological principles and natural processes. To accomplish this, original research was required. Field studies of wash vegetation and wildlife and the use of GIS technology contributed toward the ecological inventory of the NSA. Arizona State University has made significant contributions in the collection, management, and synthesis of this information.

The development of this plan incorporated the ongoing efforts of various city departments including Planning, Street Transportation, and Water Services. The Sonoran Preserve will enhance future settlement in the City of Phoenix and elevate the quality of life for residents. Ongoing collaboration and coordination will be required to ensure that maximum benefit and protection of the preserve is realized. The benefits of the Sonoran Preserve will reach beyond the NSA and have a positive impact on the entire city and metropolitan area. The magnitude of this impact is a reflection of the commitment and involvement of the City Council, the Planning Commission, the Parks and Recreation Board, the Sonoran Preserve Citizen Advisory Committee, and others who volunteer their time, energy, and expertise.

The Sonoran Preserve Master Plan identified the configuration of the preserve and appropriate and inappropriate uses. The plan includes 21,500 acres of desert lands that represents the diversity of the Sonoran Desert, from species-rich washes to saguaro-studded hillsides. The lands preserved will provide a broad range of recreational opportunities for diverse groups

of users. A hierarchy of access points was developed to coordinate with environmental education facilities. While trails were considered, no specific trails plan has been developed for the NSA.

## Acquisition

The detailed acquisition strategies indicate a level of analysis that is uncommon in public policy documents. The acquisition model presented in chapter four allows staff to consider a number of scenarios and adjust preservation and development priorities or policies accordingly. Like the Phoenix Mountain Preserve program, this will be a long-term effort. The Sonoran Preserve study area is 130 square miles and will require several decades to completely develop. The plan and the tools discussed in this document are interactive and will allow staff and future councils to adapt to the city's constantly changing and dynamic environment.

Tasks required to continue refinement of the plan and move toward its realization and management include:

- Completion and submission of an application to the Arizona State Land Department under the Arizona Preserve Initiative for the approximately 15,000 acres of State Trust Land identified in the Sonoran Preserve Master Plan
- Continued communication with other city departments and private landowners to ensure acquisition of private lands identified in this plan as they move through the development process
- Continued coordination and communication with open space owners and managers within the NSA and outside the city—fostering long-term cooperation and coordinating integration of the preservation ethic into the overall urban form will enhance recreational opportunities and facilitate preservation of the biological diversity of the Sonoran Desert
- Continued coordination with other city departments guiding growth management plans and the planning and development of infrastructure in the NSA—coordination of the Sonoran Preserve should be balanced with the need for infrastructure to provide mutual benefit to both the developed and undeveloped areas of the NSA
- Development of design guidelines for all planned improvements that occur within the Sonoran Preserve—these guidelines should embrace the natural environment and can provide a visible example of humans living in harmony with their environment

- Development of design guidelines that address all lands adjacent to the Sonoran Preserve—careful attention is needed to balance public access and social equity with environmental sensitivity and preservation
- Development of a trails plan specifically addressing the lands identified in the Sonoran Preserve—this plan should be coordinated with existing and planned trails at both the local and regional level
- Development of trail and preserve management standards for the entire desert park and preserve system
- Continued collection, evaluation, and synthesis of cultural and ecological information to inform the refinement and management of the Sonoran Preserve
- Identification and provision of necessary resources to develop, staff, manage, and acquire the lands identified in the Sonoran Preserve Master Plan—to adequately meet the needs of preserve users and to protect this valuable resource operations funding must be linked to acquisition

History shows that the residents of Phoenix can rise to such a challenge. They have long been supporters of the mountain preserves and desert parks at the ballot box, as volunteers, and as stewards of the land. The fact that some of our prime neighborhoods are adjacent to desert parks, preserves, and natural open space attests to the value Phoenixians place on the Sonoran Desert. The tourism and development industry in the Valley recognizes this and regularly features parks and preserves when promoting the area. The *Sonoran Preserve Master Plan* is the first step in continuing this legacy and improving the quality of life in the city for future generations. The benefits of the preserve are multifaceted; in fact, approximately 15,000 acres of the proposed preserve is Arizona State Trust Land currently within the city limits, and proceeds from the sale of these lands will go to the state education trust. Preserving the desert and supporting education is a true win/win situation for the community.

The mission of the Phoenix Parks, Recreation and Library Department is to enhance the quality of life by providing and maintaining the richness and diversity of a safe, available, accessible, and affordable system of parks, recreation, and libraries. Aldo Leopold cautioned that public policies were controversial in 1949, the same year his *Sand County Almanac* was published. For many Americans, this book articulated the need for love and respect of the natural environment. Pivotal moments in history are seldom without controversy, but the opportunity to create our own legacy of preservation is within reach. The *Sonoran Preserve Master Plan* will play a prominent role in the fulfillment of this mission.

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